

[An Italian Shed Owner]

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AN ITALIAN SHED OWNER

About a dozen sheds are strung along the banks of the river in the lower stoneshed section. For the most part they are well kept and prosperous looking, but the inevitable dreariness of stone and dust pervades the scene. Opposite the last shed on a knoll across the cement road is a red brick house. There is a carved urn on the step landing.

"I had it built when I bought that shed over there," Mr. Tornazzi said with a wave of his hand towards the long sprawling building. "Years ago sheds were built circular, for convenience. Not an entire circle, but about two-thirds. There are still a few left. The travelling cranes we have now are fast doing away with them. Those days they had stationary boom derricks that swung around and took granite blocks off the railroad cars. There were many openings in those circular sheds, the derrick left the stone at the opening where it was wanted. That meadow where my shed stands was called the Douglas meadow. Granite men still speak of sheds being located in certain meadows. Bachelors' meadow, Burnham's meadow, Smith's. They used to hay on the meadow next to my shed; as the granite business grew the meadow was converted into sites for stonesheds.

"I was born in Baveno, Italy. That's in northern Italy near Lake [Nagglore?]. I studied sculpturing eight years, and graduated from the [Realo?] Accademia of Belle Arte di [Brera?] in Milan. I worked in the northern provinces for two years and 2 spent one year in Saragossa, Spain. There's always a demand for good carvers in both Italy and Spain. Not only for memorials but for buildings. The architecture in those countries is much more

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ornate than here in the States. That's why talented young men who could afford it trained at good art academies. The schools emphasized fine, delicate carving. But the pay for good carving is less. When I was over there last year, the average worker was getting around \$3.00 a day, here he gets over \$6.00. And the living expenses aren't any cheaper. I'd heard about the granite industry in the Barre district and I decided to try my luck over here. I came over about forty years ago on a French boat from Havre, France. French boats were popular in those days. Today most of the Italians come over on Italian boats.

"When I got to Barre I found that some of those specially trained artists were conducting night classes for stonecutters in the old Aqua Pura building. It cost little, and many young fellows took advantage of this school. In those days stonecutters who did fine, artistic work were called 'statue cutters'; the less skilled were known as 'stone masons.' Since then Barre has had various training schools. In 1911 the Granite Cutters' Union held night school for draftsman and modelers. I didn't start operating a shed of my own right away, although I could have. I wanted to learn more of this country and the way the sheds did business. I did carving for a shed in Barre the first year. The second year I went out to our western granite States. I could compare the two localities then, and the granite. I found you could do better, more delicate work with the hard Barre stone, and I learned that it rated high in eastern markets and was quickly becoming known further west, so I decided to settle in or near Barre.

"My brother, who had come to this country two years before I did, suggested that we start a shed of our own. We did. That was back in '11. 'We've had our ups and downs as every business has, but we've made money and we've put out plenty of memorials that we're proud of. Twelve years ago my brother died of stonecutters' T.B.

"I married. My daughter says it's like a story in a book. From Havre I came to New York; and from there, direct to Barre. Passing through the town in the train, my first impression was not unlike that of several small industrial communities in Italy, France and Spain. Small stores, back yard washing, a town that was very much lived in. Not of the size nor

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[grandeur?] of Milan where I studied. But a live, thriving town in the center of hills, like my home town. I'd hardly stepped off the train when I heard my brother calling, "Giacomo! Giacomo!" There he was waiting for me on the platform, and beside him was a pretty girl; red-cheeked and very slim. I must have stared at her like a country fool. She mumbled a goodbye to my brother and hurried away.

"Carlo, my brother, was eager to hear the news from the old country. How were the parents, and the sister? Did I have a good trip? I'm afraid I answered him briefly. I was interested in the girl. Who was she? Was she already married? Her name was Elsa, Carlo told me. She was born in Barre and educated there. Her parents are Italian. She worked in a millinery shop on Main Street. For a week I made it my business to pass that milliner's store every day. I saw her, and she saw me. She wouldn't even smile. I didn't have the courage to speak to her. I finally persuaded my brother to introduce us. We were married the following year. It wasn't a Roman Catholic service, just a civil ceremony. Elsa's people had already broken from the church before they left the old country. We have one daughter. She went to the public schools here and to a finishing school on the Hudson. She's married to an Irish boy from Barre. He's here with us now learning the granite business. Some day the business will be his and my daughter's.

"There isn't the profit in the business that there used to be. In the old days a roof over the head, a good carver, and good granite were about all that were necessary. Now there's too much overhead. Three or four taxes a year, machinery, and that expensive dust removing equipment. Today, too, much of our granite is sent out unfinished. The customer has it finished in his own locality. That's why our [really?] good carvers are thinning out. There isn't the demand for them that there used to be. I have a quarry over at Groton, it hasn't been operating for a dozen years or so. It's good granite, but to supply only my own shed I found it more profitable to buy from the large Barre quarries.

"My favorite memorial, and what I believe in my masterpiece, is one of my early statues. It's called The Little Margaret, and stands in the Green Mountain Cemetery in Montpelier.

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There's a story to that, too. This customer wanted me to carve a statue of his little daughter who was dead. I'd never seen the girl. Her family produced a full length picture of her and asked me to make the statue identical in clothing, posture, and so forth. I said it would be difficult since the picture was a poor one, and faint, but I'd do my best. I completed it, and was proud of it. The parents liked it, too. I remember the mother cried and said it looked real. But in spite of their satisfaction they hated to pay the price agreed upon. I admit it was a steep price, but it was good work, and hard, and they could afford it. Anyway, the father came to me one day. He pointed to the picture and said, 'Look, you promised to make the statue exactly like this picture. You didn't. On the memorial there's a button missing on one shoe. Since they aren't identical you should lower the price.' It made me mad. I'd been very careful in carving those shoes, they were old fashioned, high buttoned shoes the girls wore at that time, and since the picture was so dim I'd been careful to make sure of each detail. 'They are identical,' I told him. I held a magnifying glass over the picture and sure enough it showed one button missing on the shoe. Well, the short of it is the man stopped quibbling and paid the price I'd asked. Another one of my best big jobs is the statue of Christ the Shepherd, in Chicago. This is one of my favorite pieces," he said, pointing to a delicately sculptured 'Grace' about fourteen inches high, tiptoeing on a pedestal at the foot of the curved stairway.

"Of late I haven't done much carving. I have enough to do taking care of the business end of the shed. Strikes are bad for both the shed owner and the workers. I've lost customers because of contracts for memorials that fall due during a strike period. If the stone isn't delivered on the day called for in the contract, they can refuse to accept it. There have been times when I've been tempted to work the shed scab, but I finally decide that it isn't worth while."